

## Northern Altar Valley Reserve



Flooding in 2005 along the Brawley Wash north of the Bee & Mordka properties, looking northeast across the Tucson Mountains. Photo from Regional Flood Control District.

## Properties that Contribute to the Reserve: Bee and Mordka along the Brawley Wash

**Fee Lands: 160 acres**  
**Acquired: February 4, 2005**  
**Cost: \$81,138**  
**Fund: 2004 Bond Funds**  
**Partner: Arizona Land and Water Trust**

### Background

On February 4, 2005, the County acquired two properties located along the Brawley Wash, west of Tucson Mountain Park. It is bordered on the north and west by the Tohono O'odham Nation's Garcia Strip and on the south by the Tortuga Ranch owned by the Pascua Yaqui Tribe. The 120-acre property was purchased from Nancy Bee for \$60,873. The adjacent 40-acre property was purchased from Mordka Enterprises for \$20,265.

### Significance of the Brawley Wash

The Brawley Wash represents one of the best opportunities in eastern Pima County for riparian restoration. The Brawley Wash in its entirety runs from the southern end of Pima County

in Altar Valley where it is known as the Altar Wash, across Ajo Highway, where it becomes known as the Brawley Wash. It then converges with the Black Wash and continues north out of Pima County until it finally merges with the Santa Cruz River in Pinal County.

Much of the Brawley Wash is in either public ownership or privately owned for ranching or farming. Upstream in Altar Valley: Pima County now owns several ranches, Tucson Water owns former agricultural properties, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and Arizona State Land Department manage properties, and many privately owned ranches are part of the Altar Valley Conservation Alliance. North of Ajo Highway in Avra Valley: Pima County owns the Buckelew Farm, the Regional Flood Control District owns several properties acquired through the Floodprone Land Acquisition Program, the Pascua Yaqui Tribe manages the Tortuga Ranch, the Garcia Strip of the Tohono O'odham Nation is actively farmed, Tucson Water owns former agricultural properties of which some are proposed for conservation via its draft Habitat Conservation Plan, the Bureau of Reclamation owns a wildlife mitigation corridor, the BLM manages the Ironwood Forest National Monument, and private farms are common up towards Marana.

Because the Brawley Wash system is generally unimproved and so much of it is either in public ownership or owned by ranchers that also want to see its health restored, we have significant opportunities long-term to preserve natural floodplain functions and restore such functions where they have been degraded.



## Biological Resources

It is highly likely that Tumamoc Globeberry is found on the Bee and Mordka properties, which is a plant designated by the County as a Priority Vulnerable Species and is underrepresented in the County reserve system. These properties are within the Biological Core Management Area and Important Riparian Area categories of the Conservation Lands System.

## Historical and Cultural Resources

A survey of the properties revealed five archaeological sites. Many isolated prehistoric artifacts were also noted in association with the wash system, suggesting the area had been used by prehistoric people for agricultural purposes. The historic occupations on two sites, possibly three, date to the early 20th century, which fits with the addition of the Garcia Strip to the Tohono O’odham Reservation in 1916.

## Management

Opportunities for restoration of these properties in conjunction with other portions of the Brawley Wash, is dependent on future uses of the Tohono O’odham and the Pascua Yaqui Tribe’s lands to the north and south. The Tohono O’odham have put significant acreage into irrigated agriculture to the north east of the County properties.



Ajo Highway bridge crossing the Brawley Wash looking south during the 2005 flood. Photo from Regional Flood Control District.



Ajo Highway bridge crossing the Brawley Wash looking north. Photo from Regional Flood Control District.

## Ongoing Property Improvements

- No active ongoing management activities are in place.
- The parcels are monitored during the year and any vandalism noted and security fencing and signage are replaced as necessary.
- Off road vehicle intrusions are one of the primary impacts that are being monitored.
- The properties have been closed to any further grazing.

